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INTRODUCTION

“Just as the great ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt, so this Dharma and Discipline has but one taste, the taste of liberation.” (Anguttara Nikaya VIII: 19)

The Buddha views the world as an illusion. Bound to it, one is unable to free oneself from suffering. He therefore shows the path that leads one to see the true nature of the world, which consists of the Five Aggregates of Clinging. By following the path true vision arises, and one

awakens. This is the path of insight meditation. Having achieved a certain degree of concentration, one proceeds to insight. To practice insight two important mental factors are needed, mindfulness and wisdom.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness comes face to face with the object of focus and does not forget. Mindfulness is free from judgment, bias, prejudice, and preference. Instead, keeping the mind centered, mindfulness simply observes, recognizes, allows,

and accepts phenomena arising in the present moment for what they are, neither embellishing them nor detracting from them.

For example, when anger is present, one recognizes that it is present. One simply observes it, is aware of it, and knows it as it persists and finally passes away. The same holds when observing other mental and material phenomena.

Without mindfulness the untrained mind will react with craving to pleasant objects, with aversion to

unpleasant ones, and with ignorance to neutral objects. Such reactions agitate both mind and body. There is no inner peace or happiness. And fresh karma is accumulated, which is bound to bring us and others woe.

Mindfulness is like a car's braking system. Imagine a car without brakes. Driving it one would certainly meet with accidents. Mindfulness brings the mind under control and protects it from its habitual patterns of reacting.

Mindfulness allows and accepts

what is happening at this moment without reacting further. Acceptance means accepting what is just as it is without passing judgment. Biased judgment distorts our picture of reality. For example, when one feels irritated by the mistakes one repeatedly makes, instead of mindfully accepting the fact at this moment, one becomes upset even to the point of developing a feeling of self-hatred. This reaction is harmful. But if one can accept the fact in a dispassionate way as “a mere mental factor” without passing judgment or compulsively reacting, one will be free of that miserable state

of self-loathing. Accept whatever states arise objectively, without emotional involvement.

Non-acceptance means creating a conflict between what is real at this moment and what we want things to be or how we would have them turn out. So mindfulness covers two aspects, recognizing and accepting.

Mindfulness slows down mental activity, which allows wisdom to directly see the transient nature of phenomena.

WISDOM

Wisdom dispels the darkness of ignorance. Such darkness conceals the three universal characteristics of impermanence, suffering, and impersonality of mind and body.

In insight practice, the Five Aggregates of Clinging are the objects of mindful observation and investigation. These five are form (body), feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness (mind). The Five Aggregates are subject to clinging by view and craving.

Why do we crave for the Five Aggregates? Because we do not yet see their faults and the danger inherent in them. An innocent child fascinated by the beauty of fireworks develops an intense craving for them, and grasping them out of curiosity, gets burned. Then the child becomes disillusioned and realizes that fireworks are dangerous and are not to be held on to. As a result, he turns away from grasping. Likewise, before the danger of the Five Aggregates is realized, one perceives them in a distorted way. One regards them as permanent, able to

satisfy, and under one's control, and thus develops craving for them.

Until insight knowledge arises and penetrates their true nature as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and impersonal (not-self), their danger remains concealed. But when insight succeeds, their nature is revealed. One becomes disillusioned and gets disenchanted with their reality. By directly knowing and seeing the danger inherent in the aggregates one has been clinging to, one becomes willing to abandon the origin of suffering : craving.

The practice starts when any of the six sense-objects impinge on the six sense-bases. Various mental formations are formed owing to such impingements. So it is crucial to watch the mind's reaction at the moment of contact. After all, mind precedes all states. Physical and verbal actions follow the command of the mind. When mind reacts negatively, we suffer. To free oneself from the torment of identifying with the mind, watch the mind.

Letting go of grasping body

is relatively easy compared to our clinging to mind. Growth and decline, birth and death, such things are easily seen in the body. But as for the mind, most beings are unable to experience revulsion. They are unable to become dispassionate toward it. Why? Because for a long time, mind has been grasped and held to as mine, I, and myself. It is for this reason too, we contemplate the mind repeatedly to see its conditionally arising nature. You may ask, “Who is the one who watches the mind?” There is no one. Each succeeding consciousness is aware of the preceding consciousness in an unbroken

continuity of processes. Mind is not a compact entity. It is a composite of ever-changing constituent factors.

When striving for liberating wisdom in formal meditation such as one's daily practice, one mindfully observes body, feelings, consciousness, and mental objects.

Use the following moment-to-moment practice summarized in the acronym RADICL to easily remember the practice:

R—RECOGNIZE IT.

Recognize phenomena (anger, joy, greed, heat, confusion, tension, fear, sleepiness, pain, happiness, depression, stiffness, remorse...) as they arise. Let them be what they are, merely impersonal mental and material events.

A—ACCEPT IT.

Accept what is just as it is. Resisting the unpleasant activates the underlying tendency of anger. Do not resist. Clinging to the pleasant activates

the underlying tendency of greed. Do not cling. Embellishing the present activates the underlying tendencies of confusion and restlessness. Do not become deluded by fantasizing that it is other than the way it is. Accept it with equanimity, and breathe a sigh of relief that it does not have to be otherwise to gain liberation.

D—DEPERSONALIZE IT.

Identity view stubbornly remains intact, contaminating our mental stream, a habitual reaction to almost everything that arises as

body and mind. If delusion leads us to spontaneously grasp at emotions and bodily pain as mine, or myself, the remedy is to dis-identify and see phenomena as impersonal. Self-grasping and false identification gives rise to more suffering. For example, if, when experiencing sorrow, we identify it as me or mine, how can we be free from that sorrow? In fact, the dependently arisen sorrow intensifies, owing to our grasping. It is not tenable to view sorrow as self, for sorrow soon passes away. If it were, it would follow that “I pass away along with sorrow.” All emotions are impermanent, and

to regard them otherwise is the wrong way of perceiving things, giving rise to more suffering. When we regard our emotion as self, we indeed “freeze” or “pause” the emotion. Its nature of arising and passing away is interfered with or interrupted. As a result, that emotion seems lasting and “real” owing to our holding on to and engagement with it. When insight arises, one will see that emotion is “unreal.” It is real at the very moment of arising and soon it disappears, leaving no trace in the heart. To depersonalize or dis-identify is to mentally note arising emotions repeatedly as “not me,”

“not mine,” “not myself,” and “mere thought.” Look upon these states dispassionately. See whatever arises as foreign, as a third party, as empty or devoid of self. In this way, one frees oneself from entanglement. From a psychological point of view, this way of looking at things allows one to step back. One separates emotionally and is thereby relieved of the worry and fear that, in truth, does not belong to one. In reality, physical and mental phenomena momentarily arise, perform a function, and suddenly fall away.

I—INVESTIGATE IT.

Investigation is the mental factor of wisdom. Although it is one of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, it is largely ignored in the practice of insight. To remedy this, it is sometimes helpful to ask: “If that phenomenon is not me or mine, what is it and where does it come from?” At times it is appropriate to investigate the proximate cause and root cause of it. For example, when the ear contacts abusive words, unpleasant feeling arises. After recognizing and allowing this unpleasant feeling, avoid the trap

of spontaneously identifying with it. See it as impersonal by investigating where it comes from: Such unpleasant feeling comes from ear contact with abusive words. Ear contact is the proximate cause; unpleasant feeling the effect. It is merely cause and effect, conditionally arisen. When abusive words stop impinging, contact ceases, then feeling ceases. Of course, most of us remain embroiled in unpleasant feeling due to abusive words even after ear contact has ceased. What is the root cause of this continuous suffering, then? The root cause is misidentifying and clinging to feeling

as mine or myself. Due to this, memory repeatedly impinges on the mind-base rather than the ear and has a much longer life. By tracing the causes and conditions of suffering, we tackle them at their root and free ourselves from suffering. Neither cause, condition, nor effect is a self.

C—CONTEMPLATE
IMPERMANENCE.

Mentally note the impermanence of whatever arises at the six bases of sensory contact. Attend to it again and again as incessant change, alteration,

and dissolution. Note it constantly and continuously. Why? There are five reasons: (1) To resolve the perverted perception of permanence embedded in the mind, which prevents it from seeing phenomena as they actually are. (2) To harmonize mind with reality, for as the Buddha repeatedly pointed out, “Impermanent are all formations, their nature is rising and ceasing.” The characteristic of impermanence does not become apparent when this constant rising and ceasing is not given attention. As impermanence is the reality, only by noting the impermanent as impermanent do

we harmonize mind with reality and does the truth manifest clearly. (3) To avoid the arising of grasping and craving. Craving takes root when we regard whatever we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, feel, perceive, think, and fabricate as pleasurable, delightful, and permanent. When craving arises, it conditions clinging; clinging conditions becoming; becoming conditions birth; and birth conditions aging, sickness, sorrow, lamentation, despair, and the entire mass of suffering, rotating the chain of Dependent Origination. The chain is broken by systematically contemplating the

impermanence and danger of the six sense-objects, six sense-bases, six types of consciousness, six types of contact, and the six types of feeling born from the six contacts. When feeling fades away, craving ceases. In this way, craving is abandoned from moment to moment. (4) To train the mind to let go of clinging to what is passing. The word “impermanent” teaches the sub-consciousness to let go of the clinging. This is because the mind is not inclined to take hold of things that are arising and disintegrating every moment. (5) To arouse revulsion toward the Five Aggregates and the

six bases of contact. As the Buddha said: *'Whoever, dwells contemplating the impermanence in the six bases of sensory contact, in him the revulsion towards sensory contact will be firmly established; this is its outcome.'*

As one continuously contemplates impermanence, it comes to a point where one sees phenomena arise and pass away very swiftly. The oppression of this constant arising and passing away, especially the arising or appearance of phenomena, comes to be seen as terror, stress and insecurity. The formations appear as a huge mass

of danger, devoid of satisfaction. One comes to understand Buddha's famous utterance: "*Whatever arises is the arising of suffering; whatever ceases is the cessation of suffering.*" When one sees the formations in this way as danger, one becomes disenchanted toward and takes no delight in any formation. The mind instead inclines and leans toward the state of non-arising and cessation. The non-arising is viewed as peace, bliss, relief, security—Nirvana.

Unless the impermanent nature of things is revealed, it will remain

concealed in “continuity”, as we mistake the continuity of the process for stability, something lasting, satisfactoriness, and self. But when the continuity is disrupted, and the mind clearly perceives the arising and passing away of each phenomena in succession, one feels the suffering and pain of being oppressed by the constant change it perceives, and the unsatisfactory nature of phenomena will also become evident. The mode of being continuously oppressed is the characteristic of suffering. What is impermanent and suffering cannot be regarded as a permanent self, because

there is no exercising of power over these phenomena, and one further realizes non-self.

L—LET IT GO.

Mentally note “letting go, letting go.” Try not to cling to anything, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Phenomena are allowed to come, are accepted as they are, and are allowed to go according to their nature. They cannot be prevented in either case. But struggling against reality creates a great deal of suffering. Non-clinging keeps the Five Aggregates from forming

in the future. Let go of whatever arises. Let go of whatever changes. Let go of whatever passes. Let go of all phenomena as if they were simply clouds passing in the sky or churning waves in a river, observing them but not clinging to them. Holding on to phenomena sustains consciousness. When consciousness is sustained, the Five Aggregates continue to arise. When the Five Aggregates continue to arise, suffering follows.

Having gained familiarity with this moment-to-moment process, one brings liberating wisdom to maturity

by attending to the Five Aggregates from different perspectives: as impermanent, subject to destruction, breaking up, oppressive, painful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, a killer with raised sword, an affliction, a dissolution, alien, empty, no place of refuge, void, and not a self. For total detachment, this liberating wisdom also must be noted as impermanent, suffering, and empty of self.

The view belonging to one who contemplates like this is “right view,” which leads to right application of mind, right effort, right mindfulness,

and right concentration. With well-purified action, speech, and livelihood, one is developing the Noble Eightfold Path. One understands as it really is the impermanent (Five Aggregates) as impermanent, the suffering as suffering, the conditional as conditional, the selfless as selfless. One does not engage with, cling to, or stand upon any of the aggregates as self. Seeing nothing to be taken as I or mine, the mind becomes equanimous toward all formations. And as one practices, there may come a moment when insight knowledge reaches full maturity, the mind is liberated from

clinging, and one lives happily with a mind inwardly peaceful.

The Gift of Truth Surpasses All Gifts

May all beings be well and happy,

May all beings find the path to true happiness,

May all beings share in the merit of this offering.

sadhu! sadhu! sadhu!

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